August 1, 2007

Dear Counsellor Tehrani,

Find below my report and observations on my visit to Morocco that took place between August 4th and August 18th 2007. I'm very grateful for having this chance to serve and be with the dear community of Morocco. I learnt a lot and I feel I was the one benefited most of this trip.

Action and Activities

Date August	Activity	Atten-dance	Cycle launched	Con-tacts	City
5th 6th 7th	JY Animators refresher course	11			Kanitra
8th 9th	Workshops	23	Yes	65	Sale
10th 11th 12th	Workshops, family meetings	12	Yes	50	Tangier
13th 14th	Workshops, family meetings, assistants' training	6	No		Meknas
15th 16th	Workshops, family meetings, assistants' training	13	Yes	56	Fez
17th	Meeting with ABM and Counsellor Amina				Rabat

- The animators refresher course focused on the practical part, how to start a group, how to present the program to the parents, and also focused on service activities and extra activities with the groups. There is immediate potential for forming 2 groups in Fez and Meknas, before I leave I was told the group in Fez is formed and will start its first meeting the following week. In Tangier there is one potential animator who said she will talk to her non Baha'i cousins, to invite them to the program as well. She needs a lot of encouragement though. The other animators still need to build a community of interest and overcome their fear of declaring their faith.
- Originally the plan for the workshops was that we do refresher courses on book 2 and book 6. After the first days there and discussing with Counsellor Amina, we thought that Anna's presentation isn't what they really need at this stage, so we decided to do unit 3 of book 2, and another workshop focusing on how to build a community of interest and inspiring them to share the message of Baha'u'llah with their families, neighbors and friends.
- The cycle was launched in Sale with 5 families (11 people wrote down their contacts), in Tangier with 3 families and 3 individuals (8 individuals wrote their contacts), and in Fez with 4 families (8 individuals wrote their contacts).
- The family meetings were for the families who couldn't attend the meetings or for families with good potential with the aim of encouraging and helping them to do more. Most of the family visits were very uplifting and I felt their faith and dedication. Only few of them had an outward orientation though.
- On the last day of the program there was supposed to be an assistants' training, but I was told after a few days that it was not possible to arrange for the meeting due to distance, work commitments and the fact that some assistants were traveling. So I arranged for assistants' meetings in Meknas and Fez. There are two assistants in each city. The two meetings were very fruitful; we studied the systematization letter and the Imran workshop. We all felt inspired and happy about the new insights gained. The concept of accompaniment was stressed in two directions; being with

the friends in the field and an example in having your own experience, and helping them step by step in their endeavors to start and sustain their activities.

General Notes and Observations

- Counsellor Amina and the ABMs made a huge effort for my visit to be successful, they encouraged families and friends one by one to attend the meetings.
- My first impression is that there is no unified vision among the community of Morocco, and I feel that the NSA and other institutions can and should play a greater role in creating this vision and in supporting the institute process as our main focus now. I heard comments that not everyone trusts the institute process and some friends question the need for statistics and planning. The old believers, who are respected and loved among all the community, also don't participate in the process.
- The challenge is that a large portion of the community is afraid of showing their Baha'i identity. They still think it's not wise to teach. I felt shocked at first when I had this impression from young youth, junior youth, or even new believers. This fear prevents them from making use of the great opportunities they have, they instead see them as difficulties or obstacles.
- From my visit, my own small teaching experiences on the train, and from the stories I heard from the friends in all cities, I have the feeling that there is great receptivity among the Moroccan community. It is very good that the Baha'is in Morocco are all Moroccan, and from diverse classes and backgrounds, which gives them access to the community as a whole. I heard more than one example of a Baha'i married to a non Baha'i who, after accepting the Faith, teaches their own family members and they in return become Baha'is and teach their family and so on.
- The rule of the family strategy that says we shouldn't introduce the new believers to the community is very important; unfortunately it's not well applied in Morocco and that's why we see that after a short period of time the new believers become infected with the fear and start to show the same reluctance to teach.
- I noted that the concepts of the Ruhi books were not clear to many of the people; they - for example - didn't know what the practices of book 2 are! The Moroccan example shows very clearly that we need to focus on the practices of the Ruhi books if we want to give the friends the tools to teach.
- I had the chance to talk to JY in Kanitra, Tangier and Fez. None of them had told any of their friends or classmates that they were Baha'is. After talking to them and encouraging them, they became very excited and determined to share the message of Baha'u'llah with their friends. If the law of teaching the Faith is not present in the minds of the Baha'is in a community, this is reflected in the JY and their potential is lost.
- I felt it was very useful to use real and true stories from our experience in Jordan. I felt that after reading a quotation, the people were still hesitant, but after sharing a story with them, they were convinced that it is applicable and could happen in this time and in this culture.
- I felt that there are so many things in common between Jordan and Morocco, whether in the Baha'i community or the community at large. This helped me so much in discussing their challenges and how to overcome them.
- Concerning the ABMs, Osama is well known and loved among most of the friends there, Huda is still new but she is dedicated, well known and loved in Tangier.

- Counsellor Amina chose the 2 youth to go to India for the 45 days workshop, and I talked to them and encouraged them. One of them is an assistant in Fez and has field experience, the other is a good potential and willing to serve.
- Illiteracy is a major problem in Morocco, I was told it's around 50% of the population; in the Baha'i community I know about 2 families that are illiterate.
- August is not the best time to visit the Baha'i community there; most of the Moroccans are traveling either outside or within Morocco during this month before the schools start in September.

Plan of Action

- I think in all the cities there is great potential. We know that accompaniment is the key for progress and this is very clear in Morocco. Accompaniment has to be strengthened. The assistants were not trained on the new concepts and strategies and they didn't know exactly their duties. We decided that the training that I did with the assistants in Meknas and Fez should be done with the rest of the assistants. Also ABMs should accompany their assistants and guide them very closely, especially in this first stage.
- Knowing that it's a priority to work with the friends, especially the youth, to encourage them to show their Baha'i identity, I think we should also work at different levels at the same time. There are some friends who have already passed this stage, and now need to be guided on how to invite their friends to core activities; others already have activities with friends, and we need to help them sustain their activities according to the strategy.
- After meeting with Counsellor Amina and ABM Osama, it is suggested that Flora should come in November. We thought it's a good time for the Moroccan friends and the second cycle could be launched. Flora could focus on 3 or 4 cities only (Fez, Rabat, Tangier and Meknas) and try to help the friends mainly in children classes and devotional meetings. Details will be arranged with Counsellor Amina.
- The JYG are held with Baha'i JY only. I suggested stopping the groups if they are with Baha'is only, because this wastes the time, distracts the friends and also gives them a feeling of doing enough. Instead regular meetings with the Baha'i JY should be focusing on how to teach, invite our friends and show our identity using inspiring stories and quotations.

Cities visited and observations

Sale:

City near Rabat, the community there has good potential. Nadia is the assistant there, she has core activities, and she is a courageous teacher. The community there has a good number of contacts and during my visit we established DMs in every house. I see a potential for 3 study circles in 3 different families either with neighbors or their extended family.

Tangier:

ABM Huda and two other youth form a teaching team; they have a good number of contacts and they started study circles already. This teaching team and another family there can be an example for the other friends and accompany them to develop an outward orientation..

Meknas:

The two young assistants are very good and dedicated; one of them has her own JYG with 6 non Baha'i youth, and is planning to have another one soon; the other assistant also had a study circle with members of his extended family, and wants to start children classes with neighbors. I haven't met many members of this community; I heard about a family who started JY and discussion sessions with their contacts; they were traveling at the time I was there. The assistants are going to accompany them.

Fez:

I see the greatest potential in the Fez community. The assistants are good examples; there are a few families and individuals that are of great potential. Only few families were at the launching session, but from the visits and the meeting with the assistants and the friends there I know that the number of contacts and COI could be way more than what we have written down at the launching. I think with follow up, accompaniment, and encouragement they can do so much there. The institute process stopped sometime ago, many tutors and resources moved away in the past years. At the time I was there we launched a book 6 crash course that was supposed to finish in 2 weekends.

After the training with the assistants we suggested to select 4-6 families to work with, and ABM Osama was going to visit them the following weekend to launch the cycle with these families. Some youth individuals who are good potentials were put into either teaching teams or with another family to encourage them more.

There is a chance of having a receptive population in a rural area near Fez where a Baha'i family came from. It seems possible to arrange for 1-2 members of this family to go there for 3-6 months to teach the Faith and launch the process. I think this could be a great potential of growth. I also learned that in the 1960's there was one village in another rural area where about 40-60 people enrolled, but there was no follow up and they disappeared now.

Stories

Sofyane is a young Baha'i from Sale, he is an animator and is chosen to go to India. At the time when I was in Sale I stayed at his place. He was inspired from the workshop and in the first night I woke up and he was online, talking to his Moroccan friend and telling her about the Faith for the first time. In the following week, he also visited two of his friends and started talking to them about the Faith for the first time.

Nadia is from the Sale community, she is a mother of 3 girls. She has overcome her fear and told her friends and neighbors about the Faith. She started children classes with her neighbors' children; the mother of these children became very interested in the Faith after observing the children classes, participated in a study circle and became Baha'i.

Noureddin is another youth from the Sale community. In the book 5 refresher course we discussed about starting his own JYG and I was sad to know that a young Baha'i like him had never told his friends about the Faith and that he thinks it is wisdom, although his parent are first generation Baha'is. We discussed some quotations and the next day he participated in the workshop in Sale. After this he teamed up with his friend, a student from central Africa, and they went to their common friends to tell them about the Faith.

Hasan is a teacher in the Fez community. His school is in a rural village near Fez; he has been there for 9 years and has very good relations with the village

community, the teachers and the parents of his students; they all love him and trust him. He never told any one that he is a Baha'i and he thinks it’s because he never got the right chance, or the right person to teach! I asked him why he doesn’t teach any of these trusted people he knows. He said it’s because the village is small and the news spread fast, so if he told any of them, then they will tell one another, and then everyone will know, and that might cause the authorities to come and talk to him, and accuse him of teaching in public and this might harm the Baha'i community of Morocco! Hasan was there at the launching in Fez and wrote down the names of 8 of his contacts. He pledged to start talking to them about serious matters as a first step to teach them the Faith.

Warm regards
Faris